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RACE RELATIONSHIP IN THE SOUTH

BY W. D. WEATHERFORD, PH.D.,¹

Nashville, Tenn.

Perhaps the most difficult task which one ever sets for himself is an attempt to understand even imperfectly, much more difficult to trace with any degree of scientific accuracy, the feelings that lie behind any relationships of human beings who are brought into close juxtaposition in life. This is all the more difficult when the peoples brought into such relationship are of widely differing racial types. Here one has no statistics that are accurate, and it is even difficult to get men from either side to express themselves freely. Yet there are certain attitudes which come to the surface in thought and action, which enable the careful observer to sense this inter-racial feeling.

The attitude of the two races in the South towards each other naturally shows three types or tendencies, each corresponding to a rather clearly marked period of history in the development of the South. Of the first two of these attitudes we need speak but briefly.

The first period of race relationship in the South runs from 1619, the time of the landing of the first slaves by a Dutch trading vessel, up to the breaking out of the Civil War. It may be briefly characterized as an era of paternalism on the part of the majority of slave owners, and of faithful, childlike loyalty on the part of the most of the slaves. We are too far away from slavery, and see its evils too clearly to make any attempt whatever to justify it, or even to gloss over its hardships. But if we are to understand the present relations of the races, a word must be said about this earlier attitude. That this period was marked by good feeling on both sides in the vast majority of cases, I believe no honest investigator could doubt. The great mass of slaves were not owned by the big planters and worked in gangs driven by a cruel overseer, but rather they were distributed in small groups, on the small plantations, where they had a large degree of personal attention from both master and mistress. I have known

¹ The author of this paper is a Southern man, trained in a Southern university, and has travelled throughout the South during the last twelve years.

and talked with scores of these faithful slaves, and rarely have I found other than a feeling of deep love and loyalty to that generation of Southern white people, who, although, they were mistaken in the defense of slavery, nevertheless tempered their mistake with a most kindly heart.

These were the days before men's passions had been aroused, and when the better nature of most men—not all—was in the ascendency. This better nature expressed itself in many ways. For one, the Southern church assumed a definite responsibility for the Christianizing of the slaves. In 1860, at the breaking out of the Civil War, the Methodist Episcopal Church South had 327 white missionaries in the field working for the evangelization of the slaves, and the budget of that one church for that year for Negro evangelization was more than \$86,000. All the other Southern denominations were having a large share in this type of work. Bishop W. R. Lambuth, of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, who is one of the best authorities on the Negro, is now saying that one of the greatest pieces of missionary work the world has ever seen was the evangelization of the Negro in this first period of his slavery. This fact is significant to us here only as it shows us what the relation of the whites was toward blacks at this early period. On the other hand, the attitude of the Negroes was one of loyalty and affection—omitting, of course, those who were worked in large gangs under the cruel overseer. No better proof of the truth of this statement could be asked than the simple fact that during all the dark days of the Civil War the Negroes were entrusted with the lives, the property, and the honor of the Southern white homes—and no Negro was found faithless in this sacred trust. Such faithfulness and loyalty were not the fruit of hatred, but of love. If one visits some of the old plantations, with the "big house" and the long rows of whitewashed cabins which flank its sides—one can still find many signs of this kindly feeling between the races. But this particular relationship is gone forever, and we may well be thankful it is. Perhaps some will regret more that the feeling begotten by that relationship has almost as completely disappeared.

The second period of race relationship in the South may be called, for want of a better term, the period of reconstruction. This period extends from the close of the Civil War to the early nineties. It is marked by a growing distrust on the part of the white man, and a growing hatred on the part of the black man. It is one of those sad

and unfortunate periods when all men seem to be in a sense blind. The North felt that the South was attempting to forge a new chain of slavery for the Negro; the South felt that the North was trying to enslave the white man by putting the ignorant and inexperienced into the saddle of government; the Negro was the football between the two, hardly daring to trust the Southern man, scarcely believing in the sincerity of the Northern man—feeling himself ground between two relentless mill stones—and knowing not whither to turn. In all this dark period there are only two redeeming rays of light. One of these consists in the fact that the Negro was never denied a chance in the South to make an honest dollar. Whatever other injustices he may have suffered he was never denied the right to work, provided he had been trained, as most of them had, through the thousands of plantations which were highly practical trade schools. Dr. Booker T. Washington has said in a dozen different ways that the South is and always has been the Negroes' greatest field of industrial opportunity.

The second ray of hope in these dark days lay in the fact that both South and North realized that the Negro must be trained and made efficient. The North poured its thousands of dollars into mission schools, and added thereto scores of priceless and unselfish lives to bring the message, while the South as early as the seventies settled the question, once for all, that the Negro should have a chance for training. In the years that have passed the South has put multiplied millions of dollars into this enterprise which, however discouraging in the past, is now beginning to show signs of rich fruitage.

The terrible results of the period of reconstruction lay in the fact that the old feeling of love and loyalty, trust and helpfulness between Southern whites and Southern blacks was almost entirely broken down, and there was a severe separation of the Southern white man and the Southern Negro. The two grew apart and soon began to be ignorant of the thought and life each of the other. The old intimate relation of the two was gone and nothing took its place. It was but natural that this ignorance should soon breed contempt and later hatred.

This in a word characterizes the first two periods of race relationships. One says they are behind him; another does not care to dwell on them at length. There is no more pitiable piece of demagoguery going than that practiced by some who dwell exclusively on the past kindness of the white man, the loyalty of the Negro, and the horror of

reconstruction, forgetting the present duties that fall to each citizen whether white or black. These things are of the past—and let the dead past bury its dead. We are now interested in what the living relationship is between white and black in the South.

It was not until far into the nineties that the third period of this race relationship began to dawn. With the coming of such men as Chancellor D. C. Barrow of the University of Georgia, Bishop Charles B. Galloway of Mississippi—and, more definitely, with the coming of Mr. Edgar Gardiner Murphy of Alabama—whose book on the *Present South* marked a new era of thought—with the coming of these and others likeminded the new epoch was slowly ushered in. But even the last decade of the last century saw little progress, and the first half of the first decade of our present century was scarcely more than the budding of a larger hope that has been blossoming out into a rose of beauty in these last five years. I do not believe it to be an over-statement that the last five years have seen the growth of sentiment, more constructive work done, more ripening of what before was only unmaturing thought, than in all the time from reconstruction on. It is with a glad heart, therefore, that one attempts to measure in some degree the growth of this idea of brotherhood between the races during these last five years.

As I remarked before, we cannot rely on statistics to guide us here, but must choose, as our guides in estimating present feeling, those events and thought currents that rise to the surface of Southern life. It must be largely the laboratory method of first hand investigation, which will furnish the data for such a statement as this. I shall attempt, therefore, to mention a few events and tendencies which will throw light on the present feeling existing between the races.

1. Perhaps the tendency most easily discerned is the growing appreciation on the part of the Southern white man of a real system of training for the Negro. As before stated the Southern States deliberately set their faces toward such a policy during the seventies. Since that time more than \$200,000,000 have been spent on the Negro public schools, and of course most of this has been paid by the white tax payer, though two corrective words should be said in this connection. First, the Negro is rapidly coming to bear his share of the taxes for education since he now owns property valued at \$700,000,000. The second word is that ultimately the labor which produces wealth

pays the taxes, and the Negro, as the laborer of the South, has always produced much of the wealth which has paid the taxes for education.

But there is a new attitude toward the training of the Negro. Somehow in the past we have offered this training—such as it was—but half way hoped it would not be taken. In fact many have believed that it would be harmful if taken. But I believe we are seeing a new light. We are not only offering a better training to the Negro now than ever before, but we are also eager to see him take advantage of this training and most of us believe in our heart of hearts that he will be a better man, a better citizen, and a more efficient economic factor if he will take all the training offered and more. There is no danger now that the Southern white man will retrench in his plans for developing the Negro race. The demagogues have blasted away at this rock of our faith with all the political dynamite at their disposal but the rock is unmoved. Thanks to the good common sense and the Christian spirit of the South, Mr. Vardaman, Mr. Blease, and others likeminded, who would give to the Negro only what he pays, are fighting a losing battle. The whole South has become convinced that the Negro must have a chance—and in this we are really reaching a sense of democracy which we have never before known.

2. This leads me to a second indication of a growing sense of friendliness on the part of the Southern white man—a new appreciation of the value of naked humanity. Not interest in a man because he is cultured, or wealthy, or influential, but because he is human. This is the basis of all democracy, and incidentally one might remark it is a higher democracy than Thomas Jefferson ever dreamed of. This is coming not only in the South but also slowly, all over the world. It is more than the square deal economically of which we have heard—it is respecting and appreciating and having a friendly attitude toward all humanity. This feeling finds expression in the new hatred of lynching which is growing in the South. We are coming to see that we cannot lynch Negroes and continue to hold our sense of respect for humanity as humanity. In spite of a few demagogues and hot heads who get their names in the associated press as advocates of summary dealings with certain types of Negroes, the determination is growing in the hearts of thousands of the best Southern whites that the lynching of Negroes must stop.

3. There is also a decided movement on the part of the lawyers, business men and others to see that more justice is done to the Negroes

in the courts. All of these things are the outcome of this new respect for the humanity of the Negro.

4. A still further result of this appreciation of the sacredness of all persons lies in the newer forms of social service which are being promoted among Negroes. Never before has there been so much talk about the condition of sanitation in the midst of which Negroes live. Never has the health of the Negro elicited so much attention as now. Never has the housing question had so much careful, painstaking study as has been undertaken within the last five years. The Southern Sociological Congress, which met in its second annual session in Atlanta, Georgia, last April studied six great questions in its section meetings. One of these questions was the Negro life. There were six hundred delegates—including perhaps more than a hundred Negroes who were regular members of the Congress, and at least four hundred of the six hundred delegates were regularly in attendance at the Race Problem section—while the remaining two hundred attended the other five sections. For three days we four hundred—white and black—discussed in a perfect spirit of harmony and helpfulness the big problems of our relation to each other and our basis of coöperation! We discussed health, housing, sanitation, education, religious life, economic progress—all in the spirit of constructive coöperation between the races. Both Negroes and white men entered into the discussion, and the feeling of cordial helpfulness was the most remarkable evidence of a new fellowship and appreciation. One could enlarge at length, not only on the importance of the study of these problems, but also on what is more significant—the coöperative study which the two races are undertaking together. It marks a new era. It is the return of the old confidence of the first era of slavery without the handicaps and evils that burdened that period.²

5. One must pass quickly to another indication of the better relationship between the races, found in the eager attention given by Southern white college men to this whole topic. Some have felt that this is by far the most hopeful sign of the times, and indeed it is most significant. Some four years ago the leaders of the Student Young Men's Christian Associations in the South felt that something must be done to bring the white college men to know the Negro

² For full proceedings of the Congress, write J. E. McCulloch, Nashville, Tenn. Price, \$2.

as he is today, and through that knowledge to bring to the college a spirit of helpfulness. It was felt that the college men were the most open-minded and responsive section of our Southern life, and would most readily accept the suggestion of a thorough study of the whole problem. A volume³ was, therefore, prepared with this group of men in mind, and was launched through the voluntary organization of the Student Christian Association. The fondest hope of those who were promoting the scheme did not expect that more than one or two thousand college men could be secured to make this study during the first year. What was our surprise and great delight to find that four thousand men enrolled and followed the course with great enthusiasm. To our greater surprise nearly six thousand students enrolled the second year, and a demand came for more detailed information as to progress in the race itself. A second volume has, therefore, been prepared⁴ and large numbers of both college men and women have been enrolled in the study of these two books during the past year. Many of the churches are now taking up the study, and in not a few schools these volumes have been introduced into the curriculum study of economics and sociology, as parallel reading. Under the leadership of Dr. James H. Dillard of the Jeanes and Slater Funds, a commission of state university professors has also been organized, which is making a first hand investigation of the whole subject of the uplift of the Negro. The members of this commission are appointed officially by the faculties of these state universities, and hence their findings will have much weight and influence.

6. The outcome of this study on the part of so many of our choicest young men and women in the South, has been not a little first hand social investigation, and even more of social service. In some university centers the white college men organized the Negro men of the city in a study of civil problems, such as health, housing, sanitation, the relation of illiteracy to economic efficiency, the relation of the whiskey traffic to the life of the Negro, and other kindred themes. Seventy-five Negro men were members of this study club, and out of it has grown a Negro city charities organization. In dozens of other college centers Negro boys' clubs have been organized, night schools established, Sunday schools started, lectures on civic conditions given,

³ *Negro Life in the South*. Association Press, New York. Price, 50 cents.

⁴ *Present Forces in Negro Progress*. Association Press, New York. Price, 50 cents.

etc. The Southern white college men are coming to realize this responsibility to help the Negro—not as a Negro, but as a man who has had less chance than themselves, and to whom they should pass on some of their larger life.

7. This leads me to add a sentence about the dedication of Southern life to the problem. It was said earlier that the Methodist Church in the South had 327 white missionaries at work for the Negro at the opening of the Civil War. At that time many of the slave holders prided themselves on the instruction both mental and moral which they could personally impart to their slaves. Davis, Lee, and Jackson, were all conspicuous examples of this. But after the war the Southern white people left this to the Northern missionary and the Negro himself. Now and then an outstanding man like Rev. John Little in Louisville, Kentucky, would dedicate his life to the uplift of the Negro, but their number was small. Now, however, that more study is being done and that a new spirit is dawning, a goodly company of our choicest white college men and women are offering their lives to the uplift of the Negro race. Perhaps no one will ever be able to measure the tremendous contribution of such men as Mr. Jackson Davis, of Virginia, Mr. J. L. Sibley of Alabama, and Dr. James H. Dillard of New Orleans and others who are giving themselves to the building up of the rural Negro schools. They are men out of the heart of the old South, men with high traditions of family, of splendid training, and their work marks an entirely new attitude toward the whole race problem throughout the South. During the last three years quite a number of undergraduate students in our white colleges have deliberately dedicated their lives to the uplift of the Negro race. Hundreds of these young men are definitely planning to have their part of this race uplift, as laymen serving on boards of trustees for schools, members of committees on social service, etc. This is by all means the most hopeful sign of a better day of race understanding in the South.

8. One of the most significant outreaches of the new interest on the part of Southern white men is to be seen in the growth of race pride and race consciousness on the part of the Negro. No race can ever expect to elicit respect and confidence from others so long as it does not believe in itself. If the Negro in the South wants to win the favor and the sympathetic coöperation of the white man there is no surer way of doing this than through the development of his own race

consciousness and race pride. The white people of the South are doing much to develop this spirit. Through a better type of school which makes the Negro more efficient and self respecting; through farm demonstration work which makes the farmer economically independent; through working with the Negro rather than for the Negro in social uplift; and in many other ways the Negro is being helped into self-respecting citizenship. When the Negro has become economically efficient, intellectually more advanced, racially self conscious, there will be far less friction, for he will then feel as the white man feels that racial integrity and social separation are best for both races. Indeed most of the best trained Southern Negroes I know at present feel as the white man does about this matter—that each race can make its largest contribution to humanity if it develops its own race life and race consciousness. It has been the fear on the part of the Southern white man that development of the Negro intellectually and economically would mean race amalgamation. But as this race consciousness grows stronger and stronger in the Negro race this feeling will be allayed and the two races will dwell side by side in a spirit of increasing brotherhood. As a Southern man, trained in a Southern University, living daily in the midst of these vexatious problems, and working every day to bring about better relations, I feel decidedly that the outlook is brighter than it has ever been in our history.

The careful scientific study being made by college students and professors, the new spirit of social service coöperation, the better type of farming methods passed on by the white men to their colored neighbors, the more efficient Negro schools carried on under the direction of our choicest white educators, the growth of race pride on the part of the Negro himself, and the growing respect for personality as such—all these are signs of the dawning of a new and brighter day both for white and black in the South.